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Comparison of Marketing Mix Dimensions between Local and International Hotel Customers in Malaysia

NOOR IZZA ROZIAN SANIB^{a*}, YUHANIS ABDUL AZIZ^b,
ZAITON SAMDIN^c AND KHALID AB RAHIM^d

Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to compare the perception of local and international customer of marketing mix components in the hotel industry in Malaysia. The exploratory study involved 282 respondents, employed self-completed questionnaire survey to collect data from local and international hotel customers. *T*-test analysis and One-way ANOVA are used to identify the significant mean difference of marketing mix components between local and international hotel customer. The main finding indicated that the three components of marketing mix namely product and services, promotion and people have significant differences between the means for both local and international hotel customers. This study also revealed that the product/services and promotion also had significance mean difference between the means of male and female hotel customer. Implications and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Keywords: Marketing mix, customers, hotel, malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's tourism industry is one of the biggest income contributors to the service sector and has been identified as having potentials to increase its contribution in Malaysia economic growth (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006-2010). According to Mensah (2005), tourism is a major source of income and employment for many countries that depend heavily on environmental resources such as climate and landscape. Tourism industry in Malaysia also acts as an important foreign exchange earner to domestic economic by attracting investments and also providing employment.

* Corresponding Author: E-mail: yuhanis@upm.edu.my

Any remaining errors or omissions rest solely with the author(s) of this paper.

Malaysia has some of the most attractive holiday destinations in the world. Both local and foreign tourists have contributed significantly to the development of tourism. Tourism is the service industry with three main focuses. One of the focus and very important in the service industry is accommodation services which covered hotels, restaurants, bars and entertainment venues. These accommodations provide the place for travellers to stay and to enjoy leisure during their travel period. This current study will focus on the hotel industry, which is one of the most important parts of tourism industry, and support service that affect the Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) to a country (Muthe, 2010).

In the hotel industry, the customer or always known as hotel guest is the important person because they are the person that will observe the level of service delivered by the hotel and the achievement of the hotel will depend to the customer. Zairi (2000) said "Customers are the purpose of what we do and rather than them depending on us, we very much depend on them. The customer is not the source of a problem, we shouldn't perhaps make a wish that customers 'should go away' because our future and our security will be put in jeopardy" (pg. 331-335).

Nowadays, marketing has put emphasis on satisfying the customer needs. The customer tends to make decisions on buying a product or services based on their expectation on the value of the product or services delivered. From the company's point of view, the goal of marketing is to build and manage profit from customer relationships. In order to achieve this goal, it is not sufficient by market and sells the product but the organization needs to make sure the product sold will meet the standards and fulfil the customer's expectations. Therefore, the company must be aware and understand their customer's needs, wants and demands. That is the reason why many organizations put a lot of effort and invest their money to analyse their customer's behaviour and learning about the different ways to deliver to the customer value and satisfaction (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). One of the most important marketing elements that is critically important to be managed is marketing mix.

The main idea of marketing mix is to influence and convince the consumers to buy and use the company's product or service. In order to attract and to satisfy customer, marketing mix with main 4P's which include product, price, place and promotions and extra 3P's that are people, physical evidence and process approaches are always used as the formula to influence the demand for its products and services (Kotler, 2004).

A number of empirical studies have sought to explore the differences between multiple groups in the context of hospitality industry. Past studies are also focusing on the tourist destination experience and its linkages with tourist behaviour. Mustafa

(2011), for example, measured and tested the differences between the groups of international and domestic tourist markets in terms of behavioural determinants. Chai (2011) investigated male and female consumers' perception on marketing mix. His study focused on a group of business degree students who were considered as experienced consumer and have some knowledge in marketing. Other study by Ariffin, Maghzi and Norzalita (2011) compared the levels of expectations on hotel hospitality between local and foreign guests. The findings of past research claimed that variables such as tourist markets in terms of behavioural determinants, consumer experience and expectations on hotel hospitality vary according to nationality and gender group (Mustafa, 2011; Chai, 2011; Ariffin, Maghzi and Norzalita, 2011). Despite several researches on marketing mix of hospitality industry (e.g. Amzad, Wang and Summaya, 2012; Chai, 2011), evidence on the comparison of marketing mix dimensions between local and international tourist as well as the gender remain limited. Moreover, previous study argued that gender differences in tourist behaviour have been ignored by researchers (Kinnard and Hall, 1995, Richter, 1995). It also appears that relatively limited has been conducted in examining gender differences with local and international customers. Further investigation of customer perceptions on marketing mix is important because in order to remain competitive and financially successful, the most important concern is by segmenting the market into the right group of customers. Understanding the preferences in marketing mix between the local and international hotel customer may benefit the hotel significantly. The examination of the differences between these groups is critical because international customers come from different cultures and backgrounds which require a specific marketing strategy as compared to the locals who are already familiar with the local customs and practices. Moreover, the hotel managers are highly advised to know how to develop an attractive service and improve marketing efforts while maximize their use of resources. Accordingly, this would allow hotel organizations to identify the best and suitable marketing strategy to be taken to attract both local and international customer stay at their hotel. In similar line, understanding further the demographic differences such as gender and others between local and international hotel guest would provide a useful basis for segmentation and positioning of the hotels particularly with regards to demographic segmentation. Therefore, the first objective of this study is to compare the perception of marketing mix dimensions between local and international hotel customers in the Malaysian hotel industry. The second objective is to compare the perceptions towards marketing mix dimensions between genders of the hotel customers. The final objective is to examine the comparison of customer's profile and travel information between local and international hotel customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia Hotel Industry

Hotel is a building providing accommodation, meals and other services for travellers and tourists. In Malaysia, the hotel industry has been recognized as a potential prospect in the growth of the service industry and it faced an encouraging growth rate since early 90s due to the continuous growth of tourism industry. Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) was established in 1974 and has constantly enhanced the hotel and tourism industry by integrating member hotels throughout Malaysia.

Table 1 shows the competitiveness of hotel industry from in terms of the supply of hotels and average occupancy rate. The total number of hotels increased over the year as well as the average hotel occupancy rate which is increased steadily from 2004 till 2007, however due to the economic slowdown in 2008 to 2010, the average occupancy rate of hotels in Malaysia has decreased (Annual Tourism Statistical Report, 2011). In 2011, the average occupancy rate of hotels in Malaysia starts to increase again.

Table 1 Supply of hotel and average occupancy rate in Malaysia, 2004 – 2012

Year	Supply of hotels	Average occupancy rate (%)
2004	2224	60.8
2005	2269	63.6
2006	2336	65.5
2007	2360	70.0
2008	2373	66.3
2009	2373	60.9
2010	2367	59.3
2011	2707	60.6
2012	2724	62.4

Source: Ministry of Tourism (2013)

The need for hotel classification systems has been increasing steadily along with the growth of tourism and as more information technology has become available for all people. A hotel classification system was designed to ensure safe, consistent lodging and food for tourist's and also to ensure that the hotel chosen by traveller meets minimum standards in term of accommodation, facilities and service. Hotels may be viewed as luxury hotels at one end of the scale and budget hotels at the other end. The focus of hotel classification systems has moved from consumer protection to consumer information. According to a research study by World Tourism Organization (WTO) and International Hotel and Restaurant Association

(IHandRA) (2004), the most widely used graphical symbol in hotel classification is the star. In Malaysia, official hotel classification system is compulsory by MOTOUR and it is a mandatory system. It is necessary for a hotel to be classified before it can obtain license and permission to operate. Hotel classification schemes in Malaysia are divided into two categories, namely the Star Rating (from one- to five-star) and the Orchid Rating (from one- to three-orchid).

The Concept of Marketing Mix

Marketing can be defined as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others. (Kotler, Bowen and Maken, 1999). The first concept of the marketing mix and the Four Ps (product, place, price and promotion) of marketing were introduced by McCarthy (1960). Later, Judd (1987) suggests a fifth P, people, to the original 4Ps (McCarthy, 1964), thereby regarding the marketing staff as a major marketing parameter. In the present study, the 'people' component is included in the marketing mix framework as people are the basic building block in the service transaction especially in the labour intensive industry such as the hotel industry. On the other hand, this study excludes the 'place' dimension due to the nature of the hotel industry, which is different from the product-based industry. The place in the context of service industry such as hotel can also be considered as a distribution channel which appears to be difficult to be measured along with other traditional P's. Moreover, in the context of destination marketing, place is where Malaysia is being promoted as an international location for travel and tourism, unlike typical places for product. Thus, this study regards place dimension as less suitable to be evaluated together with other mixes. Accordingly, only three P's and extra P's which is People are used to compare the perception between local and international hotel customers in Malaysia.

Product and Services

Product is defined as anything that can be offered to a market for attention, use or consumption that might fulfil a want or need (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). Product can be a physical object, service or a benefit offered by the marketer. They also have both tangible as well as intangible attributes. Ferrell (2005) claimed that the product is the main of the marketing mix strategy where retailers can offer different product from their competitors. In the hospitality industry, the products are primarily designed to satisfy the needs and wants of different type of customers. As part of the marketing mix, a hotel room can be seen as a product that the company sells

to customer. Hotel rooms can differ in quality or services they offer as well as the target of customer who usually have the need for a specific type of room. For example, a businessman can have different kind of needs from a hotel room than a leisure traveller.

Price

Price is the amount of money charged for a product, services or the total values that consumers exchange for the benefits of having or using that product or service (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, and Saunder, 2008). Price is considered as the most important measurement of repurchase intentions (Oh, 2000; Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000). Zeithaml (1988) claimed that the customers normally will think whether they received the value for their money or not before they decide to return the purchase from the same service provider. So, price is the key to marketing strategy and not only it acts as a weapon to respond competitors but also to ensure survival of the organization.

Promotion

Promotion is a decision of how to relate the product to the target market and how to persuade them to buy it (Lovelock, Patterson and Walker, 1998). Promotion involved the activities that marketer communicates with customers in order to acknowledge their product such as advertising, sales promotions, personal selling and publicity. All of the activities can influence customer's way of thinking, their emotions, their experience and their purchasing. Promotion is also important in providing the information, advice, and it persuades the target market. It will guide the customer to take action at a specific time and how they can use the product and get beneficial result from it. The activities of promotion can be delivered by individual sales people, television and radio, the Internet, magazine, press and all types of media. For example, the hotel can use different websites to advertise their products and services and also use brand identification to their advantage (Bowie and Buttle, 2004).

People

People in the marketing mix are defined as a service and it refers to all of human actors who play a part in service delivery and influence the buyer's perception in the service environment. In the hospitality organization, people refer to the human resource and it plays important role in performing, quality control and personal selling (Kotler, 2007). In the hotel industry, they need people called as employees

who have “the right service attitude” that rarely taught but it usually comes naturally. If the employees do not have the right attitude towards their work and serving customers, they can be the factor of failure for the hotel management’s efforts in delivering the good service quality (Bowie and Buttle, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to compare the perception towards the marketing mix components between local and international hotel customers in the Malaysian hotel industry. The study also wish to compare the perceptions of marketing mix components between genders of the hotel customers and to examine the demographic and travel profile differences between local and international hotel customers. A convenience sampling of hotel customers was chosen. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who stayed in hotels at the Central Region of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Putrajaya, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca) and volunteer to involve in this study. Hotels in Central Region were choosing since almost 29% of hotels of Malaysia are located in these regions. The instrument for this study is designed based on existing literature review and a modification is made accordingly to statements in questionnaire to match the marketing mix and hotel industry in Malaysia.

The questionnaire consists of three main sections. Section A asked about information of accommodation such as name of hotel staying, purpose of staying at the hotel and also type or rating of hotel staying. Section B was measured marketing mix components, which include product/service, price, promotion and people. Meanwhile, section C captures the individual profile of the respondents such as of their age, gender, marital status, country of origin and occupation. These items were measured on five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *neutral*, (4) *agree* and (5) *strongly agree*. The measurement was adopted from past studies (Ching and Dung, 2006; Martina, 2009; Maryam and Kang, 2010; Halil and Kashif, 2005 ; Afshan , Sadia and Khusro, 2011). The questionnaire was prepared in two languages, in English and Malay to cater to both local and international hotel guests.

After removing incomplete responses, 282 valid questionnaires were used to analyse the objectives of the current study. Descriptive statistics test was used to determine the frequency and the mean for each construct of accommodation information and demographic profile. A *t*-test and One-way ANOVA analysis was used to understand whether there was any significant mean differences between the local and international hotel customers on marketing mix attributes as well as on accommodation information and demographic profile.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Respondents' Profile

In this study, simple frequency and descriptive analysis was conducted on the hotel guest's demographic and travel profile. Table 2 present the descriptive result of the respondent's profiles. As reported in the table, 51.8% (n=146) of the respondents were male and 48.2% (n=136) of respondents were female. In terms of marital status grouping, over half of the respondents were married (51.8%), while 48.2% were single. In a grouping based on respondent's primary occupation, most of respondents (30%) are working as executive. Respondents who worked as self-employed showed the lowest percentage (3.2%). There were 76.2% of customers stayed in the hotel because of leisure purposes and only 23.8% of them stayed because of business and working purposes. In terms of type hotel chosen by customers, most of customers

Table 2 Frequencies of demographic respondents and accommodation information attributes of malaysia hotel customers

Demographic attributes	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	146	51.8
Female	136	48.2
Marital Status		
Single	136	48.2
Married	146	51.8
Occupation		
Professional/Manager	53	18.8
Executive	87	30.9
Non-executive	58	20.6
Self Employed	9	3.2
Student	45	16.0
Retired	10	3.5
Others	20	7.1
Purpose of stay		
Leisure	215	76.2
Business/working	67	23.8
Type of hotel		
1- or 2- Star	64	22.7
3- Star	67	23.8
4- Star	89	31.5
5- Star	62	22.0

prefer to stay at 4-star hotel which showed about 31.5% (n=89). As evidence from the findings, the purpose of stay and type of hotel chosen appear to be related to each other. Previous literature has shown that some customers may only need a bed to sleep in for a night, some customers are coming for a big conference held in the hotel or some others are coming to the hotel for an all-inclusive five-star holiday (Medlik and Ingram 2000).

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was done to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha, α measured reliability coefficient for the items of each construct. Generally, a questionnaire with α of 0.8 is considered reliable (Field, 2009). Other study revealed when it reached 0.70, the cut-off level of reliability recommended for theory testing research (Nunnally, 1967). As reported in table 3, it was found that three constructs reported the α of above 0.70 which are product/services, price and people constructs. However, the promotion constructs' is below 0.700. Due to its importance for the study, the study regards this as acceptable because the reported alpha (α) may vary due to the cultural influence of the local environment.

Table 3 Reliability for the marketing mix construct of hotel in Malaysia

Marketing mix	Cumulative variance	Cronbach's α
Product/Services	28.437	0.952
Promotion	17.387	0.534
People	20.477	0.936
Price	11.713	0.919

Comparison of Marketing Mix Dimensions between Local and International Hotel Customers

Independent samples *t*-test was employed to gain a better understanding of differences that may exist between marketing mix differences of local and international hotel guests in Malaysia. Table 4 showed the means of marketing mix attributes for local and international hotel customers. Significance differences between the means were found in three components: Component 1; product and services, component 2; promotions and component 3; people. No significant mean differences between the means were found in price component ($p = 0.129$). The findings showed the largest means difference was found in the product/services attribute of both local and international customer who stayed at the hotel in Malaysia ($p = 0.000$). The findings suggest that the local customers were far more

concerned with the product and services offered, provided and delivered by the hotel as compared to the international customers. The second largest mean difference existed between the 'people' attribute ($p=0.000$). Local customer had higher mean score than international customer did for this marketing mix dimension. This may imply that the local customers perceived people as an important role in hotel operation compared to international tourists. There was little difference existed between both local and international hotel customers with promotion attribute. This indicates that the local were also particular about the amount of information through promotions done by the respected organizations. As noted earlier, only price showed insignificant mean difference between local and international hotel customers ($p = 0.129$).

Table 4 Means differences between marketing mix of local and international hotel customer

Marketing mix	Local customer	International customer	<i>t</i> -value	2-Tailed Sig
Product/Services	42.07	35.37	13.133	0.000
Promotion	17.90	15.19	5.646	0.000
People	41.77	38.32	6.783	0.000
Price	21.70	22.33	-1.523	0.129

Comparison of Marketing Mix Dimensions between Male and Female Hotel Customer

The *t*-test analysis also was conducted to examine the difference between marketing mix component with gender of the hotels customers. As can be seen from Table 5, the result demonstrated that there were only two marketing mix components (product/service and promotion) that are significantly mean different with gender.

The study found (see Table 5) that female customer felt that the product and service is important as compared to the male customer ($p=0.003$). Hence, result seemed to suggest that female customers are more particular with the types of products and levels of services delivered to them. In the same line, the promotion component was also perceived as very important to the female customer as compared to the male customer ($p=0.003$). This means that female customers thought that the way the hotel organization carries out their promotion as important in order to attract customer to stay in their hotel. No significant mean differences reported between the price and people on customer's gender. Thus, the results indicated that price and people did not have any effects on both gender.

Table 5 Means differences between marketing mix of male and female hotel customer

Marketing mix	Male	Female	<i>t</i> -value	2-Tailed sig
Product/Services	38.45	40.33	-2.998	0.003
Promotion	16.09	17.58	-3.046	0.003
People	40.01	40.76	-1.395	0.164
Price	21.97	21.94	0.770	0.939

Comparison of Respondent Profile between Local and International Hotel Customers

In order to evaluate the third objective of the study which is to examine the profile and travel information differences between local and international hotel customers, the *t*-test analysis were employed. Table 6 reports the findings. It was found that there was a significant difference between the means of the genders with the local and international hotel customers (*t*-value = -29.404, *p* = 0.000). Thus, *t*-test revealed that local female customers were likely to have more vacations and trips away from home as compared to male counterpart. In contrasts, international male customers were more likely to travel away from home as compared to the female counterpart. This result has been supported by previous studies that claimed the tendency of male travelling overseas is higher compared to the female (Jianakoplos and Bernasek, 1998; Sunden and Surette, 1998). Table 6 also reported that, the significant difference was found in the marital status (*t*-value = -63.885 and *p*-value = 0.000). Although the results cannot be generalised, the results indicate that single international tourists can travel more than single local tourists. Similarly, the results also indicate that married local couples can travel more than international married couples. This clearly provides important implications to the hotel managers.

Table 6 Means differences between gender and marital status of local and international hotel customer

Demographic attributes	Local customer N = 168	International customer N = 114	<i>t</i> -value	2- tailed Sig
Gender				
Male	68 (40.5%)	78 (68.4%)	3.197	0.002
Female	100 (59.5%)	36 (31.6%)		
Marital status				
Single	70 (42.7%)	66 (57.9%)	2.954	0.003
Married	98 (57.3%)	48 (42.1%)		

One-way ANOVA was performed to examine the difference between local and international tourist towards their occupation (Table 7). However, the result demonstrates that there was no significant difference found for respondent's occupation.

Table 7 Means differences between occupation of local and international hotel customer

Demographic attributes	Local customer N = 168	International customer N = 114	F-value	2-tailed Sig
Occupation				
Professional/Manager	38 (22.6%)	15 (13.2%)	0.418	0.518
Executive	43 (25.6%)	44 (38.6%)		
Non- executive	35 (20.8%)	23 (20.2%)		
Self employed	3 (1.8%)	6 (5.3%)		
Student	35 (20.8%)	10 (8.8%)		
Retired	5 (3.0%)	5 (4.4%)		
Other	9 (5.3%)	11 (9.6%)		

Comparison of Accommodation Information between Local and International Hotel Customers

Table 8 showed the purpose of stay information for the local and international hotel customers. Type of hotel chosen by customer sometimes depends on their purpose of travel or stay (Lane and Jacobson, 1995). The analysis found the significant differences between the means of local and international customer with the purpose of stay and types of hotels (p -value = 0.000). Table 8 reports that the purpose of stay was different for both locals and international customers. The results suggest that international customers visit Malaysia for leisure purposes as compared to the local customers. On the other hand, majority of the local customers stayed at the hotel due to business purposes as compared to the international tourist.

Table 8 Means differences between purpose of stay of local and international hotel customer

Information attributes	Local customer N = 168	International customer N = 114	t-value	2-tailed Sig
Purpose of stay				
Leisure	110 (65.5%)	105 (92.1%)	5.959	0.000
Business	58 (34.5%)	9 (7.9%)		

Types of hotel mean differences with regards to the local and international customers were identified by using One-way ANOVA test. The analysis revealed that there was a significant means difference among the types of hotel selected by the customers. It appears from the table (see Table 9) that majority of the international customer prefers to stay at 4-star hotel as compared to the local customers. The results also indicate that the local customers prefer a 3-star hotel the most as compared to other stars as well as international tourists. Similarly, the result also indicates that the locals also have the tendency to stay at 5-star hotels as compared to international tourist.

Table 9 Means differences between type of hotel of local and international hotel customer

Information attributes	Local customer N = 168	International customer N = 114	F-value	2- tailed Sig
Type of hotel				
1- or 2- Star	23 (13.7%)	41 (36.0%)	45.600	0.000
3- Star	57 (33.9%)	10 (8.8 %)		
4- Star	33 (19.6%)	56 (49.1%)		
5- Star	55 (32.7%)	7 (6.1%)		

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the current study have provided an interesting conclusion with significance for both research and practice. This research demonstrates that there are significant differences between local and international in terms of their perceptions towards marketing mix. This research showed how marketing mix components affect customers’ perception in the Malaysian hotel industry by comparing from local and international and selected demographic. The findings suggest that the local customers are more concerned with the products and services delivered to them. They also appear to be more demanding towards the skill and capability of the people who served them in comparison with the international customers. Accordingly, the results suggest that international customers are much more tolerant and less demanding during their stay at the hotels. The result of the study, however, demonstrates that price did not affect both local and international customer decision in choosing hotel to stay. Therefore, hotel organization should focus more on elevating the good product and services, the competent and skilful level of people who deliver the service and also find the different way to do hotel promotion that can attract both local and international customers to stay in their hotel.

The study also provided interesting findings with regards to gender differences. As evidence, it was found those females are more concerned with the product and service delivered to them as compared to male customers. These findings put forward that the natural characteristics of a female such as femininity, meticulousness, sensitive, warmth and emotional may have some influence on their perceptions towards the types, quality of product and services delivered to them during their stay at the hotel. Similarly, female also perceived the promotions of the hotel differently as compared to male counterparts. Thus, female seems to be more influenced with promotions. This could also be linked to their natural characteristics as noted earlier. Apparently, this finding has provided some implications to hotel managers and practitioners alike. It highlighted that a distinct promotional tools is required to capture different target segment. The role of the marketing manager of the hotel is critically important so that suitable promotion can be designed to persuade customers from different segments.

On other hand, the government should increase the level of qualification in the process of classifying hotels into appropriate star rating including quality of accommodation, product and services. So, the quality of the Malaysian hotel can be improved and can be at the same level with other international hotel. Further differences were also found in gender comparison on marketing mix dimension of Malaysia hotel industry. These findings are important for hotel organizations to learn the about the profile of their customer and implement the effective market segmentation strategies. As this research has been one of the first to compare about marketing mix with local versus international customers and gender groups, both methodology and findings could be helpful for other researchers who will do similar research in the future.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study still has its limitation in term of components of marketing mix used. This study only included 4P's components which are product and services, price, promotion and people. The study could benefit more if it can include another 3P's components (Amzad, Wang and Begum, 2012), so that we can capture customer perception on each components of marketing mix. Further research is clearly required to include other components of marketing mix so that holistic findings on the importance of marketing mix can be evaluated in assisting the hotel manager to make decision. The current study also has its limitation in terms of sampling technique. Since the sampling technique used was convenience sampling, there would be the possibility of the sample might not represent the actual population and it might be biased by volunteers. But still, convenience samples

are appropriate for exploratory research (Steven, 1996) and minimal efforts have been taken to ensure the sample is representative of the population. Therefore, if the convenience sampling is choosing for future study, it is important to make sure that the characteristics of the sample or the respondent who participate match the requirement of the study.

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